

## Chapter 5

# Humor and Entertainment!

### BONDING YOUR EQUAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY

*Head Supreme Court  
Justice to Emcee :*

*"You know, Colleen,  
getting to perform  
here for this won-  
derful, wonderful  
conference really  
makes the whole  
Supreme Court gig  
seem worthwhile.  
Don't you agree,  
guys?"*

From "Lawfulpalooza"

*Igor: "Welcome to  
the Transylvania  
County Courthouse.  
I am Igor, the  
courthouse facilita-  
tor. Please come in,  
we've been expect-  
ing you."*

*Janet: "We were  
sent here by the  
SCREAMS hotline.  
We need legal help!"*

From "The AX-ESS Files:  
Justice is Out There"

#### FROM ME TO YOU

*(Sung to the Beatles' tune of the same name)*

**If there's anything that you need  
Just to take a case for free  
Just call on me, and I'll send it along  
with love to you from me**

**I got everything that you need  
Like mentors and CLE  
Just call on me, and I'll send it along  
With love to you from me**

**I got forms that you can fill out  
And keep there by your side  
You got ethics obligations  
We'll keep them satisfied — OOH**

**So if clients are what you want  
And pro bono is what you do  
Just call on me, and I'll send them along  
With love, from me to you  
To you  
To you**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

**From "Lawfulpalooza,"  
written and produced for JUSTICE AT WORK,  
Washington State's Third Annual Access to Justice Conference, April 1998**

### BONDING THE EQUAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY

As lawyers, judges and legal workers, we are accustomed to communicating serious topics in serious and circumscribed formats – through reason, persuasion, guilt-tripping, incentives, message development, reports and recommendations, use of bully pulpits, speech-

writing, conferences, jurisprudence – and on and on and on . . . most of it on white paper 8-1/2-by-11-inches or delivered orally by someone wearing a suit standing at a podium.

When was the last time you tried humor or entertainment? By opening up to alternative media, you can find a new and receptive audience for the access to justice message. The use of humor, music, color, movement and bad acting to convey those same messages bypasses our usual internal censors and opens us up to information in new ways. Harvard professor Robert Putnam, in his recent book “Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community” (Simon & Schuster, 2000), speaks of the importance of *social capital*: the diverse network of connections between people that greases the machinery of social and professional interactions. He distinguishes between “bonding social capital,” which brings people together based on their similarities to each other, and “bridging social capital,” which creates connections across differences. Both bridging and bonding social capital is created through this shared performance experience, and it accrues interest rapidly.

References have been made throughout this publication to the Wizard of Lawz, the Justice League of Washington and supreme court justices in drag. Each chapter begins with the lyrics from a song that conveys the chapter’s theme. These are taken from plays written by Marla Elliott for Washington State’s annual Access to Justice Conferences. These skits freely borrow their themes and music from great and not-so-great musicals, plays and popular music. While intentionally silly and amateurish, it is just those qualities that pull you to pay attention to the lyrics, think about the metaphors, feel connected in a comfortable and familiar way, and understand the points we’re trying to get across. To be crass — we’ve co-opted you, or, to quote Shakespeare: “The play’s the thing, in which I’ll catch the conscience of the King.”



Entertainment, or “cheap theatrics” at a conference or other event, is an extremely successful tool for building social capital. Even those who don’t want to do pro bono work, or give money, or vote to increase funding for legal services, will often be eager to take center stage and be part of a play. Even a court administrator, reluctant to engage in anything other than minimal involvement with the Equal Justice Community, jumped at the chance to dress up and overact as one of Washington’s Justice Superheroes.

And here’s why:

## 1. HUMOR AND ENTERTAINMENT ENABLE PEOPLE TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT AND SERIOUS TOPICS.

Deserving clients turned away from legal aid offices because of lack of resources is no laughing matter, but the image of Dorothy and Toto caught up in a “funding tornado” makes it less threatening. Raising issues faced by pro se litigants is easier to digest if the pro

***“Coming up with the theme for “The Wizard of Lawz” was easy. It was the year of the big LSC shake-up and reorganization. Everybody felt completely scrambled. Everybody who worked in legal services was in shock. It felt like we’d been hit by a tornado. So then we figured out who doesn’t have a heart and who doesn’t have courage and who needs a brain.”***

Marla Elliott, writer and director of the annual Access to Justice Conference skits

***“It needs to have a certain cheesy spontaneity. If it starts looking like people can really act and really sing, then it’s not as much fun and not as exciting.”***

Marla Elliott, on the elements for a successful skit





**Supervillian Status  
Quo Soliloquy:**

*"Soon I, the evil supervillian Status Quo, will control the entirety of Washington State. Our Helmets of Indifference are an infallible tool for preventing access to justice! We've already made CLEs incredibly boring. It won't be long until the entire justice system becomes so stagnant and irrelevant to the public that government itself will cease to exist!" (Laughs maniacally)*

From "The Justice League of Washington"

se litigants are Brad and Janet from the "Rocky Horror Picture Show" and their pro se assistance is provided by Elvis. Making the point that our legal system is inherently biased and indifferent to certain classes of people is less threatening if bias and indifference are personified as evil henchman putting "helmets of indifference" on the heads of otherwise compassionate and committed people who manage the legal system.

**2. HUMOR CREATES A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG PERFORMERS AND THE AUDIENCE.**

No one wants to miss a good joke, or even a bad one. "Dorothy, I don't think we're in Tukwila anymore" may not mean anything to you, but it elicited howls of appreciation and understanding from a local audience. The tension between urban western and rural eastern areas of the state was addressed by having rival "gangs" from each side don "no turf" buttons and collaborate on a grant proposal to save a rural legal aid office. The messages: we're all part of this community, we're in this together, and we speak the same language. Audience members will go out of their way to attend, get the jokes, and discuss the skit with each other.

**3. "SILLINESS" CREATES A FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH WE CAN BE CORNY AND IDEALISTIC.**



We all worry about funding. Wouldn't it be great if we could just call on the "Good Fairies of Funding," who happen to be the president of LSC, a state legislator and a judge/member of the IOLTA board – (all dressed in tutus and wings) – who solve the problem by throwing large sums of money around? When the Chief Justice, in a Superman costume, leads a large crowd in singing "We Are the Champions of Justice," it creates a sense of commitment and understanding that dozens of speeches and workshops could not.

**4. HUMOR AND ENTERTAINMENT SERVE AS ICEBREAKERS/CONVERSATION STARTERS.**

What better way to kick off a conference or event than to enlist the entire audience in singing and dancing to "This is the partnership for Access to Justice" (sung to the tune of "Age of Aquarius/Let the Sun Shine In")? What greater compliment can you pay than to tell a county courthouse facilitator how well she performed the role of "Igor the Courthouse Facilitator?" or "Did you see Judge \*\*\* in that getup last night in the skit? No? You had to be there!"

**5. POLITICAL MESSAGES CAN BE PACKAGED IN MYTHIC TERMS.**

Throughout this handbook, we emphasize the importance of creating a *story* about Access to Justice that is clear and inclusive. A satirical skit, like a political cartoon, can do exactly that. From The Iliad to Star Wars, we create cultural meaning by telling stories, and by making connections between stories of the past and present. A skit can help create a

community's vision of itself through the use of archetypal images. Whether it's Dracula from the "bloodsucking" collection agency vs. Blind Justice; the Wizard of Lawz vs. the Wicked Witch of Injustice; or the Justice League of Washington vs. Supervillain Status Quo — the message is clear that there are significant and serious problems in our justice system that are barriers for many poor and disenfranchised people. The image of Frankenstein's Monster (Blind Justice) finally coming to life only after a number of judges hit the switch with a gigantic gavel, sends a powerful message about the importance of judicial leadership in access to the justice system. And the message is even more poignant when, after throwing wads of money at her electrodes, even the Good Fairies of Funding weren't enough to raise Blind Justice.

## 6. POLITICAL MESSAGES CAN COME FROM THE MOUTHS OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS.

Imagine "The State's Greatest Superheroes": the chief justice of the state supreme court, president and director of the state bar, state court administrator and others on stage in funny costumes singing "We're all part of the Washington Justice League." You can create commitment from skit participants by explicitly planning to have them say the lines you choose.

## 7. HUMOR AND ENTERTAINMENT PROMOTE THE POSSIBILITY OF DIALOGUE BY PUTTING "SCARY" PEOPLE (E.G. JUDGES) INTO SILLY, HUMAN SITUATIONS AND COSTUMES AND ACTS AS A "LEVELER" BY DISSOLVING DIFFERENCES (E.G. SOCIAL STATUS, INCOME, PROFESSION).

Effective inclusion and power sharing is facilitated by helping people communicate laterally, regardless of status. Consider: a full majority of the state supreme court in robes and feather boas singing "Stop in the Name of Justice"; a gang of judges ("The Jets") dressed as thugs; the bar president in striped green tights singing "Bar Man" to the tune of "Soul Man"; an appellate judge with greased-back hair playing Rod Serling of the "Twilight Zone"; the general counsel of the state bar cackling maniacally as a comic book super villain. It doesn't get any better than that!

## 8. HUMOR AND ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR JOY IN DIFFICULT WORK.

We give more attention to tasks we enjoy; we spend more time with people with whom we have a good time. Our institutional problems, as well as those of our clients, can seem depressing and shocking to those from whom we most need quality attention. The seriousness of our work gets us down sometimes, too. We all need permission to find humor in serious topics, to laugh at important people, and to encourage important people to laugh at themselves. There is an all-too-human need to be connected to those who are having a great time, and we can provide that connection. It's a gift we can give to those who share, or would like to share, our goals.

### **Wizard to Tin Man:**

*"You, my friend, say  
you want a heart.  
You think that  
compassion has  
some kind of bio-  
logical prerequisite.  
Let me tell you,  
there are plenty of  
people — even  
presidents of bar  
associations — out  
there doing good  
works who have no  
more heart than  
you. However, they  
do have something  
you don't have: a  
pro bono case."  
(Wizard gives Tin  
Man a large case  
file.)*

From  
"The Wizard of Lawz"

## EXERCISES

- ✓ Write a song about Equal Justice and perform it with your colleagues at an upcoming meeting or event.

## REFERENCES TO PART II

Script from "The Wizard of Lawz," Washington State's Annual  
1996 Access to Justice Conference Skit

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(See [www.wsba.org/atj/publications.htm#conferences](http://www.wsba.org/atj/publications.htm#conferences) for skit scripts  
from 1997-2000 Access to Justice Conferences)

**Legal Aid Lawyer/  
Lion (Entering,  
answering phone):  
"Good morning,  
Courageous Legal  
Services."**

**Dorothy: "I need  
help! My landlady is  
a wicked witch!"**

**Legal Aid Lawyer/  
Lion: "Sorry, we'd  
like to help, but  
there's a funding  
tornado on the way.  
We've all got to get  
into the storm  
cellar!" (hangs up)**

From  
"The Wizard of Lawz"